

ETHICS OF SPORTS AND SPORTSMANSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

Dr Payal Sabharwal

Associate Professor, S.D. Kanya Mahavidyala, Mansa 151505(Punjab)

Email- mmanju2276@gmail.com

Abstract

Today sports events are close to battles: winning at any cost is what matters. As a result sports has been increasingly witnessing a complete disregard for sports ethics Now-a-days the influence of the money factor in sports is so great that not only contestants ready to go to any length to win a match but also they are ready to cheat, lie. Thus cheating, lying, bribery, violence and doping have become almost essential in sports and these unethical practices kills sportsmanship spirit. People need to contemplate how to retain dignity and grace in defeat. Use of wrong means to achieve a victory is degrading to very spirit of sports and humanity. Players and Spectators need to realize that one side has to win and the others has to lose after all in any game.

SPORTS events are essentially social in character. They facilitate the coming together of people from various parts of the country, at a national level, and various parts of the world, at the international level. Sports make people cross cultural barriers and speak a language that is understood by all.

The World Sports Congress, held in New Delhi, emphasized that sports could play a major role in promoting and propagating peace, provided one understood the spirit of global participation and the philosophy of sports. This philosophy of sports is based on the assumption that a "game will be played in the spirit of the game". Rules of decency and decorum will on no account be violated by all those related to sports. The spirit of sports is to embody a combination of qualities such as fairness, courtesy, generosity, grace and decency or in one word sportsman ship. Sports does not simply involve players, spectators, sports authorities, media, sponsors, in fact each and every group faction that is even only associated with sports a fundamental part of an event. And all of them, then, are expected to maintain a code of conduct and nurture the sporting spirit

Sportsmanship is the soul or essence of sports; it is a mental or psychological attitude that arouses a sense of fair play. Unless this psychological set-up is maintained, sports would become a testing ground of mere physical grows and virility. Sports sans sportsmanship is a war, a combat where winning is an end in itself. If sports encourages the development of a fine character, sports sans sportsmanship encourages outbursts of foul and animal Instincts. When Roman satirist Horace commented around 2,000 years ago- "Sports begets tumultuous strife and wrath, and wrath begets fierce quarrels"-he probably meant sports devoid of sportive spirit George Orwell, in the modern context, remarked: "Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witting violence: in other words it is war minus the shooting

Violence has always remained a part and parcel of sports. The legendary sporting event where slaves were thrown in the ring to fight hungry lions for the amusement of the Roman emperors are not something very different from the boxing matches where two adults thrash each other's head into pulp. The nature of spectator involvement is also probably the same. Violence, however, in the modern context is the result of the solid perversion of the desire to win. Killer instinct is, no doubt, a pre-requisite to victory but this instinct has unfortunately become negative, intolerant, thinking and destructive. A bowler whose delivery is intended to hurt the batsman certainly embodies the negative killer instinct. The famous cricketer, Dennis Lillie's remark-"I want to see blood splattered on the pitch"-is an example of the manifestation of a violent spirit that will accept no defeat. For most players today, sportsmanship has secondary Importance. Fairness, generosity, courtesy and decorum have given way to doping, bribery, ball tempering. In the case of cricket, widespread drug use, undignified behavior and abusive and condescending attitude tow fellow players.

A game today is not played in the spirit of the game. In order to attain hitherto unattained standards of excellence the players sometimes resort to ungentlemanly, though not always unlawful, behavior. The nobility of a game has been lost, as victory is all that matters and participation in an event is not enough. A game has become a cut-throat competition and participants from other countries are not fellow sportsmen but rivals. A performance these day doesn't bring joy; only success does. And if a player attaches so much significance to victory, can he at the same time embody the real spirit of sports?

The highly ungraceful and antagonistic behavior contending teams towards each other can be explained terms of their nationalist attitudes. Sudhanshu Shekhar Roy writes in *Sports for Global Peace* that "with advancement in all fields, the economic restructuring and the growth of regionalism, sports remain the major instrument to promote loyalty and identity". Sports is a vital field which manifests the development of a country and sportsmen, and countrymen tend to derive self-assurance and national pride from victory. The sentiment is no doubt a noble one and if motivates a player to achieve standards it should encouraged. However, nationalism in sports has taken ugly dimension. Most players regard themselves as countries personified and the playground as a *kurukshetra* where the esteem and honour of their motherland has to be kept high. However, if the patriotic sentiments of the play move towards their extreme, the game becomes a little than a war between two nations. Extreme nationality for regionality, if the game is on national level) aggravates competitive sentiments.

A similar jingoistic fervor grips the spectators Desmond Morris in his book *The Soccer Tribe* reflects on emotions that lead to a heightening of bands between people and allow for a sense of collective involvement. Spectators who are part of the crowd derive energy to relieve their ecstasy or agony. A supportive home crowd can actually inspire and elevate the players to victory. Leander Paes's performance in Davis Cup and India's success over Pakistan in the quarter-finals of Wills World Cup at Bangalore would testify to this fact. However, the reverse is also true. Volatile crowds can make the otherwise indefatigable champions lose simply because they could not perform their best in hostile conditions. Goran Ivanisevic, the Croatian tennis player, described the passionate crowds' flag-waving as "It was like playing in a zoo. They were screaming for everything."

Nationalism in sports is nothing new. Even nations express their ideological stand through sports. In the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Hitler attempted to prove the supremacy of the Aryan race. Moscow Olympics were boycotted by the US and its allies as a protest against Soviet troops taking up position in Afghanistan. The next Los Angeles Olympics were boycotted by the Soviet Union as a retaliatory measure. South Africa was banned from participating in the Olympics for 32 years because of its apartheid policies. One might succeed in giving a rational and sufficing explanation for such moves by nations but the point is that it hinders the fostering of sportsmanship, in all its connotations. Boycott of games or matches because of ideological differences presupposes that sports events are nothing but wars. Ironically, the participation of countries in sports events has failed to increase international fraternity. Latin American countries have virtually gone to war over a football match.

A person who is genuinely interested in sports would thoroughly enjoy a game, irrespective of who is playing. Having preferences for a particular player or a team is not unsportsmanlike. But basing one's preferences on nationalist grounds and letting those preferences mar a match because of highly unruly behavior would amount to ungamedly spirit. A good shot-whether played by a Tendulkar or a Jayasurya should evoke the same response. Ideally, sportsmanship allows for an honest appreciation of sports irrespective of victory or defeat (of home team or of other favorites). However, the attainment of the ideal state of maturity is almost impossibility because most people have a tendency to watch only those events in which their own country is participating. But the crowd can at least be expected to let the match proceed without any violent disruptions and refrain from venting their towards the opponent team.

The ungamedly attitude of both players and spectators can possibly be explained in terms of modern psyche of an individual. Life for most human beings today is of competition where each one struggles to win. Everyone cannot emerge victorious; however, the insatiable greed for victory remains. For the spectators the victory of one (mostly their favorite) gives them the vicarious pleas of winning. They invest in the event not just in term of money and time but also emotions. And when they make such a huge investment, they expect similar response, sometimes unreasonably. A victory leaves them euphoric while defeat makes them utterly depressed leading to hysterical responses which may be highly indiscipline and undignified. Victory for them provides satisfaction of collective ego and a triumph over destiny.

Strife and quarrels during matches have become ubiquitous. Whether it is a match on the street between children or a tournament at the school/college/district level or a national/ international sports event, it is marked by fights and serious disagreements. The unyielding spirit to win and only win, at whatsoever cost, reflects the ethos of a highly insensitive and competitive society. The players exist in society where defeat is not acceptable, where losers deserve no sympathy. The pressure on them to win, by hook or crook, is so great that the players succumb to unfair and aggressive means. They have been hailed as celebrities' by the media and have to keep up their name and fame. Is it possible for them in such circumstances, with pressure to perform better from all sides, to abstain themselves from unfair means? Degeneration of sportsmanship is also a part of the process of materialisation that a society goes through. Sports heroes are literally showered with money and advertisement contracts. Sponsorships tempt players to perform better and give their best but the true sporting spirit is pushed to the edge. It is overshadowed by obsession to make money.

Sports administration, commercial sponsors and the media are equally responsible for emotional flare-ups in the players and the spectators (or viewers). All of them play a dual role. They provide the much-needed facilities and encouragement to the sportsmen but have also created nightmares for them. Sponsorship and money from commercial houses ensure the availability of modern facilities for the players. They have helped (although indirectly) provide a professional touch to sports. But the question is do they promote a healthy sporting spirit and a healthy sports-loving nation? Do not the corporate sponsors, with the ulterior motive of selling their products, popularise or hype up a forthcoming sports event through advertisements and manipulate public behaviour?

The media's extensive coverage of sports events has made them mega events. It makes sportspersons celebrities in a day and creates a false image of their invincibility. The players become a victim of their image and cannot sustain the burden of media attention for long. Most of these players are young and, more often than not, exaggerated hero worship by the media and people makes them overconfident and brash. It also builds an insurmountable pressure on them to give a consistently good performance which is an extremely unreasonable demand.

It has been said that it is only in defeat that a human being reveals himself or herself. Losing a game creates a opportunity to show real sportsmanship-grace, dignity generosity, resilience and nobility. Unfortunately, the players and spectators need to realize that lessons are too learnt from defeat. One side has to win and the other has to lose, after all, in any game.

George Orwell once commented that serious sports had nothing to do with fair play: it was bound up with hatred jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence. The comment is apt in summing up the attitude that governs sports in modern times.

Professional sports is nothing less than a battle, and winning, is a matter of life and death. This kind of an attitude has seeped through to sports at the amateur level as well. As a result, sports has been increasingly witnessing a complete disregard for sports. Today, the influence of the money factor in sports is so great that not only are contestants ready to go to any lengths to win a match but also, they are ready to cheat, lie or commit other crimes if they have to. Thus cheating, lying and bribery, violence, doping has become almost essential in sports.

Another serious problem in modern sports is doping or use of drugs to improve one's performance. Today it is a major issue of controversy in the Olympic Games, the Asiad and other major games. Chinese sportsmen and sportswomen in particular are increasingly being held up on charges of doping. The punishment for use of drugs in sports is strict: drug-using players are not only stripped of their medals but temporarily suspended, and banned from the sport for life if drugs are again detected in the tests conducted by the authorized organization. However, these have failed to discourage the players from using them. What have also failed to check doping is the harmful effects of use of drugs for increasing performance. The major consequences of performance-boosting drugs are cancerous growths, liver damage and impotency. It is shocking to observe that mostly it is the managers of the teams as well as the coaches who are responsible for encouraging the taking of drugs among players. An incident that comes to mind is the suspension of Argentinean soccer superstar, Diego Maradona for testing positive for a drug containing five banned substances.

Bribes to players are increasingly on the rise. This practice has been most widely seen in what was once the gentleman's game-cricket. Bribes are offered to teams/ players so that the other contesting team/player can win a match. A reason for the offering of bribes is the huge amount of money that is spent by fans and groups on betting upon the winner. Thus, the defeat of a team can spell a loss of millions of

dollars for international players in the betting market. Another unethical practice is that of cheating by players on the ground or the field itself. This problem is not of new origin; however, it remains a menace to the healthy development of sports. In the game of cricket, for instance, cheating has involved use of vaseline on the ball and tampering with the ball to get quick wickets as well as throwing the ball violently to seriously injure the batsmen.

There is a need to understand why ethical standards in sports have so drastically fallen in modern times. Professional sports today are not just a game; it is taken very seriously and given all the attention that excelling in a profession demands of a person. It involves a great deal of physical and mental strain. Training often starts at a very young age-as early as the age of four or five. The child is mentally trained with the object of securing a high level of excellence in his or her discipline. For years, the blooming player spends all his time, energy and resources on acquiring the talent, devotion and perfection that will put him on the top at the earliest possible time. He sacrifices his family life and social life in the process. Thus, to achieve his aim is nothing less than an obsession for him. It is not only the urge to excel that comes from within himself: pressure from outside is equally keen to ensure that he gives more than his best. Winning means a lot of fame and, most importantly, money. The wish to be seen as a legend in the sport concerned is very strong in professional players. Thus when they are not able to achieve their dream, they sometimes take to cheating, lying, doping or even outright violence out of psychological strain and frustration. They sometimes, though sincerely, try so hard to win that they end up hurting themselves psychologically or even physically. The death of the legendary Senna, whose name is counted among the greats in car racing, on the track during a race is only one example amidst a host of others. Maybe such an attitude in sports only reflects the modern man's attitude towards life in general-one that is stressful and measured by material success alone.

Such unethical practices are antithetical to the very principle of sports. So apart from strict penalties and punishments, what can be done to ensure 'clean' sports? There is a need to sincerely understand that sports ought to be 'played' and not 'fought'. Winning and losing must be viewed as part of the game. Thus, what is required is developing a sportsman spirit within the players, the coaches, and the managers as well as sports fans. Resorting to scheming and cheap practices to simply win is not fair towards the players and teams who play the game with honesty. The wrong-doers must remember that even these players train hard to physically and mentally equip themselves for a match. Sports must involve real competition that calls into play the talent, stamina, perseverance and determination the players naturally possess or have acquired from hard training. Use of wrong means to achieve a victory is degrading the very spirit of sports and humanity. Use of drugs, in particular, ought to be effectively tackled as it shows the way to physical, mental and moral degeneration of man.

References:

1. Abad, D. (2010). Sportsmanship. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, 4(1),27-41. DOI: 10.1080/17511320903365227
2. Amorose, A. J., Anderson-Butcher, D., & Cooper, J. (2009). Predicting changes in athletes' well being from changes in need satisfaction over the course of a competitive season. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*,80(2), 386-392.
3. Arai, A., Ko, Y., & Ross, S. (2014). Branding athletes: exploration and conceptualization of athlete brand image, *Sport Management Review*, 17, 97-106.
4. Australian Government, National Integrity of Sport Unit. (2016). National Integrity of Sport Unit, accessed 8 September 2016 <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main>
5. Burroughs, B., & Vogan, T. (2015). Media Industries and Sport Scandals: Deadspin, Sports Illustrated, ESPN, and the Manti Te'o Hoax. *IJSC*, 8(1): 87-102.
11. Connor, J. (2009). Towards a sociology of drugs in sport, *Sport in Society*, 12(3), 327-328. DOI: 10.1080/17430430802673676
12. Crocker, A. (2014). The integrity of sport and the privilege against self-incrimination- is ASADA playing by the rules? *Australian and New Zealand Sports Law Journal*, 9(1): 27- 56
6. Thomas, J., & Harden, A. (2008). Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 8: 45-55 doi:10.1186/1471-2288-8-45
7. Treagas, M., Cover, R., & Beasley, C. (2011). Integrity in sport literature review, accessed 8 September 2016 http://www.ausport.gov.au/_data/assets
44. Verkooijen, K., van Hove, P., & Dik, G. (2012). Athletic identity and well-being among young talented athletes who live at a Dutch elite sport centre, *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 24: 106-113.
45. Whitaker, L., Backhouse, S. H., & Long, J. (2014). Reporting

Research paper

© 2012 IJFANS. All Rights Reserved, UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11, Iss 11, Dec 2022

doping in sport: national level athletes' perceptions of their role in doping prevention. Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports, 24(6),